

Lanzmann's "Shoah" Witness Simon Srebnik

[Santiago Alvarez](#)

In late 2010 Claude Lanzmann's "documentary" *Shoah* was re-released with much brouhaha on the occasion of its 25th anniversary. It is "considered one of the greatest documentaries ever made." Although there have been a number of revisionist critiques of various aspects of the movie, [\[1\]](#) no thorough and complete analysis of its entire content of 9½ hours has ever been made. The present paper is the beginning of a series of papers which will try to accomplish just that.

Lanzmann's movie starts with the following statement:[\[2\]](#)

"The story begins in the present at Chelmno, on the Narew River, in Poland. Fifty miles northwest of Lodz, in the heart of a region that once had a large Jewish population, Chelmno was the place in Poland where Jews were first exterminated by gas. Extermination began on 7 December 1941.

At Chelmno 400,000 Jews were murdered in two separate periods: December 1941 – spring 1943: June 1944 – January 1945."

Here we have Lanzmann's first fabrication. There is no source confirming his victim count. The highest available – unsubstantiated – figure states 360,000. [\[3\]](#) A Stalinist postwar commission claimed 340,000 victims, [\[4\]](#) but many mainstream scholars consider this number to be an exaggeration, [\[5\]](#) placing their "real" death tolls in a range between 100,000 [\[6\]](#) and 150,000. [\[7\]](#)

Lanzmann continues:

"But the way in which death was administrated remained the same throughout: the gas vans. Of the 400,000 men, women and children who went there, only two came out alive: Mordechai Podchlebnik and Simon Srebnik."

The latter's name was actually Szymon Srebrnik. There was a third survivor named Mieczysław Żurawski. All three of them were interrogated by Polish investigative judge Wladyslaw Bednarz right after the war, and they all testified during the 1961 Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. We will subsequently juxtapose these two earlier statements by Srebnik with what he told Lanzmann.



Map of Chelmno. The location of Chelmno Death Camp (CIA Factbook) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Lanzmann continues his introduction as follows:

"Srebnik, a survivor of the last period, was a boy of thirteen when he was sent to Chelmno. [...] The SS placed him in one of the 'Jewish work details', assigned to maintaining the extermination camps and that were in turn slated for death..."

With the ankles in chain, like all his companions, the boy shuffled through the village of Chelmno each day. That he was kept alive longer than the others, he owed to his extreme agility, which made him the winner of jumping contests and speed races that the SS organized for the chained prisoners."

The legend has it, of course, that Jews unable to work, which automatically included all children of 14 years and younger, were killed immediately. This witness not only claims to have been an exception, but according to Lanzmann he also won all sorts of athletic contests against grown men. Later on toward the middle of the movie Srebnik tells what he experienced while working in the "Waldkommando," which was a detail felling and chopping up trees to produce fire wood. No doubt this is one of the toughest jobs imaginable, all done by a 13-year-old boy without a batting an eye. If that is hard to believe, wait for what is yet to come:

"And, also, to his melodious voice: several times a week, when the rabbits kept in hutches by the SS needed fodder, young Srebnik rowed up the Narew, Chelmno's river, under guard, in a flat-bottomed boat, to the alfalfa fields at the edge of the village. He sang Polish folk tunes and in return the guard taught him Prussian military songs."

What a romantic scene, inmate boy and German guard fraternizing in a boat on the river, singing together...

"During the night of January, two days before Soviet troops arrived, the Nazis killed all the remaining Jews in the 'work details' with a bullet in the head. Simon Srebnik was among those executed. But the bullet missed his vital brain centers. When he came to, he crawled into a pigsty.

A Polish farmer found him there. The boy was treated and healed by a Soviet Army doctor. A few months later Simon left for Tel Aviv along with other survivors of the death camps."

In front of the Polish judge, Srebnik told the following story about having been shot but surviving this wound in 1945:[\[8\]](#)

" [An SS man] shot everybody in the back of the head. I lost consciousness and regained it when there was no one around.

All the SS men were shooting inside the granary. I crawled to the car lighting the spot and broke both headlights. Under the cover of darkness I managed to run away. The wound was not deadly. The bullet went through the neck and mouth and pierced the nose and then went out."

So not only was our survivor a Superman kid capable of hard work and beating all adult males in the camp, he could also survive being shot in the head, get up, destroy the headlights of a car, and run away... Szymon Srebnik, close-up from Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* Actually, when you look at

Lanzmann's close-up of Srebrnik (5 min 49 sec. into the movie), you can clearly see that there is no trace of any major scar on his mouth, his lips, his nose. A bullet would have left an indelible mark, though.

In front of the Jerusalem court, Srebrnik told the story as follows:[\[9\]](#)

"There was a second shot and suddenly, with the third, I was hit by a bullet.

Q. Where did the bullet strike you?

A. Here (the witness points to his neck).

Q. Is there a scar?

A. Yes.

Q. Show it to the Court.

Q. Where did the bullet come out?

A. Through my mouth.

Q. Do you have a mark on your mouth?

A. Yes, I have. It shot out two of my teeth.

Q. What happened to you after that?

A. I remained lying down. Each time he passed by, walking with his ear to the ground so that he could hear whether anybody was still moving. When there was some kind of movement, he would pull out his revolver and shoot once again. After several minutes, I regained consciousness, and when I saw him approaching, I held my breath – I did not breathe. I lay there. The second group of five came out. They were shot; there was a third group, and they were shot. There was a soldier standing near us to guard the dead; if there was still someone who was alive or who wanted to escape – then he would shoot him. Then I escaped.

I escaped and entered a stable belonging to some gentile there. I remained there until the liberation. When the Russians arrived, I was sitting there looking outside through a hole in the stable wall. I did not know whether this was a dream or reality; then someone came inside and opened the door – I did not have time to look.

He opened the door, he had a large moustache, and he said to me: 'You can go out – the Russians have already arrived.' I went out, and then the commander of the Russians who had occupied Dabie brought a doctor. The doctor said I had no chance of survival, I could live another twelve or twenty-four hours – 'He has no chance of living, since he has received a bullet in his spine.' At first sight, they thought that the wound had passed near the spine. Then they said: 'He cannot live more than twelve hours.' After thirty-six hours had passed and I was still alive, they realized that the bullet had penetrated not far from the spine.

Q. You were also wounded in the nose – is that correct?

A. Yes.

Q. To this day you have a scar?

A. Yes. My nose was cut open in two places. I asked the doctors how this happened, and they told me that when the shot hit me, I must instinctively have raised my head, and afterwards it dropped downwards, and apparently there was some piece of glass there, and I received these cuts."

With such a wound, a shot into the head and coming out through his mouth, he was still capable after several days to walk out to a Russian doctor! A miracle indeed!

During the first minutes of Lanzmann's movie Srebrnik actually doesn't say much of relevance. In one scene he states:

"It was always this peaceful here. Always. When they burnt 2,000 people – Jews – every day, it was just as peaceful."

In Jerusalem he had claimed that the Germans killed 1,200 Jews every day, [\[10\]](#) which made even the Jerusalem judge doubt the veracity of his statement by asking him:

"One of the witnesses who preceded you [Mieczysław Żurawski] gave much lower figures. Are you sure of your facts?"

But Srebrnik insisted on his figure. If considering that he was talking about activities covering roughly nine months, this would have amounted to some (9×30×1,200) 324,000 victims (or 540,000 for 2,000/day) for only that second period of the camp, resulting in even higher figures when considering the entire time the camp was in existence. As we have seen, such figures are today not even believed by mainstream historians.

During his Jerusalem testimony, Srebrnik also stated the following, among other things:

"When I arrived [at Chelmno], the building had been blown up, and we were told [...] to clean it. [...] We began cleaning the stones and everything. We found bones there, and all kinds of things – skulls, hands and legs. We did not know what it was. [...] it was explained to me that there had been a magnificent villa there, a beautiful building, and there had been Jews inside. They had contracted some sickness. They put them inside, and blew up the building together with them."

It goes without saying that destroying a large building for the sake of killing a number of persons isn't exactly a rational way of committing mass murder, all the more so since the Germans lacked housing due to the Allies' bombing campaign and would therefore never have considered such lunacy. This story has a parallel in a tale told by a defendant during a German trial held some six years later, which is the story of the alleged genesis of the so-called "gas vans." According to this, a German Chemist named Albert Widmann employed at the German Institute for Criminological Technology in Berlin (*Kriminaltechnisches Institut, KTI*) had received orders in 1939 to find a poisonous chemical which could be used to kill severely mentally disabled individuals in the course of the euthanasia program. He settled for bottled carbon monoxide. Later he is said to have gotten involved in the development of "gas vans" as well. In 1967 he was tried on both charges by the Stuttgart District Court. [\[11\]](#) The German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* reported about this trial: [\[12\]](#)

"In the fall of 1941 the expert [Widmann], who meanwhile had become the head of the chemical department of the KTI, was ordered to a mission in the east in order to develop 'other killing methods' as

a relief for the SS execution commands. Widmann traveled with eight centners [400 kg] of explosives, two metal hoses and two vehicles into the area of Minsk to experiment in murder.

The first attempts were disappointing. 25 mentally ill people were locked into a shelter, which had been prepared with explosives; Widmann gave the sign for the explosion and also operated the ignition device himself. Each time corpse fragments whirled through the air and got stuck in the trees. This procedure was unsuited for mass murder."

We can take for granted that Widmann has developed an efficient method for killing people at the beginning of the euthanasia action in late 1939 – bottled carbon monoxide. It's been tested and found foolproof. In late 1941 he is then allegedly asked to help jump-start a similar program in Minsk. Yet instead of putting this expertise to "good" use, he is said to have taken along 400 kg(!) of explosives in order to blow up the mentally ill people, which turns out to be a bloody mess – surprise, surprise! And since not all people died with the first round of dynamite, they blow them up a second time, only to find corpse parts scattered all over the surrounding trees...

Widmann is said to have even attended a conference during which the results of this experiment were analyzed:[\[13\]](#)

"During the conference with Nebe we reached the conclusion that, although killing with explosives 'occurs with a jerk,' it was not feasible due to the comprehensive preparatory works; in addition also due to the large amount of work in context with filling up the explosion craters." – not to mention picking up the intestines from the tree branches over there...

Which begs the question: Who were the mentally sick people here? The alleged victims, Widmann and his colleagues, the reporters from *Spiegel* or the prosecutors and judges during this trial, who repeated this nonsense?[\[14\]](#) Or maybe all of them?[\[15\]](#)

Srebrnik's claim is of the same lunatic quality. It reminds us of the memoirs by former Auschwitz commander Höß, who, after months of torture and imprisonment, had claimed that attempts were made to make corpses disappear by blowing them up, which, needless to say, didn't work out too well.[\[16\]](#)

An interesting feature of Srebrnik's testimony during the Eichmann trial is that for long stretches it was not Srebrnik who told a story but rather the prosecutor who merely asks the witnesses to confirm a certain claim or to specify an issue about an event assumed to be self-evident. For instance, the very first time gas vans are mentioned during Srebrnik's interrogation is by the prosecutor, who suddenly changes topics and asks him:

"Q. When did the gas trucks arrive?"

Under a proper court of law in a state under the rule of law, such a question would never have been permitted. It's like asking a person out of the blue: "when did you rape your wife?" It is clear from this that the Eichmann trial was not about discovering facts, but just to get them attested to and filled in with a few more details.

What the prosecutor was using as a basis to tell "his" story and have Srebrnik merely confirm it, was actually Srebrnik's affidavit made right after the war in front of investigative judge Wladyslaw Bednarz on 29 June 1945. In this affidavit Srebrnik stated the following about the legendary "gas vans":

"There were three vans: a larger one and two smaller ones. The larger van could hold up to 170 people, while the smaller ones, 100-120."

With this size, the witness sets a record for the vans' capacity and goes well beyond what would have been physically possible even with the large trucks claimed to have been used. [17] It seems therefore that Srebrnik had the tendency to exaggerate just about everything. He continues:

"The [gas vans] were specially adapted vans. On one of them, under a new coat of paint, one could see a trade name. I cannot remember the name, but it started with the word 'Otto.' [...]"

"(Here, the witness was shown a van found in the Ostrowski's factory in Kolo). This is the van used in Chelmno for gassing. This is the vehicle I mentioned in my testimony with the word 'Otto' on its door."

It is unfortunate for Srebrnik that in 1995 Jerzy Halbersztadt, at that time director of the Polish Program of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, published an essay based on evidence found in Polish archives which conclusively proves the vehicle "identified" by Srebrnik was *not* a gas van at all but an innocuous moving truck. Even the Polish prosecutor accepted this assessment. [18] I quote in detail from Halbersztadt's essay in my article on Lanzmann's witness Bronislaw Falborski, who has much more to say about these gas vans than Srebrnik.

Falborski, by the way, also "confirmed" the identity of this "gas van" with the innocuous moving truck during his testimony in front of judge Bednarz, [19] and so did another Chelmno survivor, Michal Podchlebnik. [20] It shows that all of these statements were orchestrated by Bednarz and his coworkers in preparation of a trial against the former German guards of the Chelmno camp. In other words: the witnesses were coached by the Polish judiciary to tell lies.

To bolster my accusation of Srebrnik's mendacity further, I submit some more statements made by him. That he is quite capable of telling the most outrageous nonsense can be seen from the following excerpt of his 1945 statement:

"There were a few instances of unintended self-incineration: a Jew trying to set fire to a pile of bodies died in the flames himself."

As if humans can suddenly catch fire when exposed to flame and die in it.

And here is yet another dramatic atrocity story from the same 1945 affidavit, which I refuse to believe, but the reader may disagree with me here:

"Finkelstein, whom I have already mentioned in my testimony, had to throw his own sister into [the] flames. She regained consciousness and shouted, 'You murderer, why are you throwing me into the furnace? I'm still alive.'"

Of course that wasn't bad enough, as this single case transmogrified into a whole vanload of Jews coming back to life and being burned alive during his interview with Claude Lanzmann: [21]

"I remember that once they were still alive. There was no room in the ovens, and the people lay on the ground. They were all moving, they were coming back to life, like normal humans, and when they were thrown into the ovens, they were all still alive. They could feel the fire burn them."

Did such horror affect this 13-year-old boy in any way?

"When I saw all that, it didn't affect me. Neither did the second or third shipment. I was only 13 years old and all I'd ever seen until I came here were dead bodies. Maybe I didn't understand."

Is that credible? I leave it to the reader to decide.

Notes:

- [1] Robert Faurisson, Review, *The Journal of Historical Review*, 8(1) (1988), pp. 85-92; Serge Thion, "Claude Lanzmann and 'Shoah: The Dictatorship of Imbecility,'" *ibid.* 16(6) (1997), pp. 8-10; Bradley R. Smith, "Abraham Bomba, Barber of Treblinka," *Confessions of a Holocaust Revisionist*, Prima Facie, Los Angeles 1987, pp. 3-107; revised in *The Revisionist* 1(2) (2003), pp. 170-176; Jean-Francois Beaulieu, "About the Shoa-Interview with the Alleged Treblinka SS-Man Franz Suchomel," *The Revisionist* 1(2) (2003), pp. 166-168; Ernst Bruun, "Rudolf Vrba exposes himself as a liar," *The Revisionist* 1(2) (2003), pp. 169f.; Robert Faurisson, "Retour sur Shoah, film de Claude Lanzmann," <http://www.vho.org/aaargh/fran/archFaur/2001-2005/RF040421.html>.
- [2] www.youtube.com/watch?v=5W0WcZu9O74.
- [3] Martin Gilbert, *Endlösung. Die Vertreibung und Vernichtung der Juden. Ein Atlas*, Rowohlt, Reinbek 1982, map on p. 169.
- [4] Central Commission for Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, *German Crimes in Poland*, Warsaw, 1946f. <http://weber.ucsd.edu/~lزامosc/gchelmno.html>
- [5] Henry Friedlander, *Der Weg zum NS-Genozid. Von der Euthanasie zur Endlösung*, Berlin-Verlag, Berlin 1997, p. 453.
- [6] Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Harper & Row, New York 1983.
- [7] Eugen Kogon et al. (eds.), *Nazi Mass Murder*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1993, p. 101.
- [8] www.holocaustresearchproject.org/survivor/srebrnik.html.
- [9] www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-066-02.html
- [10] *Ibid.*, .../ Session-066-03.html
- [11] Rüter, Christiaan F., et al. (eds.), *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen. Sammlung deutscher Strafurteile wegen nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen*, University Press, Amsterdam, vol. XXVI, case 658; LG Stuttgart, verdict of 15 Sept. 1967.
- [12] "Gaswagen-Morde: Andere Art," *Der Spiegel*, no. 14, 27 March 1967, p. 36; see www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-46450716.html.

- [13] Henry Friedlander, Sybil Milton (eds.), *Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen, Ludwigsburg, Archives of the Holocaust*, vol. 22, Garland New York 1993, p. 483; Widmann's detailed description about the experiment itself is on pp. 477-480.
- [14] Excerpts of the verdict were also printed in Hans Krausnick, Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltan-schauungskrieges*, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart 1981, pp. 548-552; see www.nizkor.org/ftp.cgi/people/ftp.py?people//w/widmann.albert/Sentence-on-A.Widmann.txt
- [15] When quoting Widmann, Kogon *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 7), p. 52f., seem to have been at least dimly aware of the nonsense, hence they mention the explosive experiment only in passing.
- [16] Broszat, Martin (ed.), *Kommandant in Auschwitz*, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart 1958, p. 159.
- [17] Cf. Pierre Marais, "The Gas Vans", *The Barnes Review*, Washington, DC, 2011, in preparation, chapter 4.2.4.
- [18] <http://dss.ucsd.edu/~lzamosc/chelm00.htm>; response to an inquiry by Leon Zamosc, University of California, San Diego, 11 Oct. 1995; Subject: Gas vans in Chelmno; enhanced with illustrations at www.deathcamps.org/gas_chambers/gas_chambers_vans.html; since 1996 Halbersztadt has been Director of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews.
- [19] Facsimile reprint in the Appendix of P. Marais, *op. cit.* (note 17); the three affidavits are also reprinted in Władysław Bednarz, *Obóz straceń w Chełmnie nad Nerem*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1946.
- [20] Although merely implicitly by referring to the truck in "the yard" missing a wheel; www.holocaustresearchproject.org/survivor/podchlebnik.html.
- [21] www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6nvodrL7Qo.

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